

PopNoir

Critical Designs Selected by Dunne & Raby

1

Michael Anastassiades

Anti-Social Light

2001

Prototype

The Anti-Social Light only works when there is complete silence. No conversation can take place around it. Noise causes the light source to dim and eventually switch off. As Michael Anastassiades says, this product is about "...respect for what the object needs and what it demands.... In an abstract way, it is almost like a companion that behaves a certain way in the house."

Michael Anastassiades, born Cyprus 1967

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2

James Auger & Jimmy Loizeau

Audio Tooth

2001

Models and video

MIBEC (micro-in-body-electronics-corporation) was invented by James and Jimmy as a platform to launch an experimental idea – a miniature telephone embedded in a tooth. They were curious to find out what kind of response they would get from the public to such an incredible idea.

The Audio Tooth implant is professionally presented as a radically new concept in personal communication. A miniature audio output device and receiver are implanted into the tooth during routine dental surgery. These offer a form of electronic

telepathy as the sound information resonates directly into the consciousness. In spite of the product's radical nature, the designers made a point to keep it within the boundaries of what would be considered believable and desirable in society today.

After the implant went public, articles were printed in all the main UK newspapers and TV news programs. It was covered on many weblogs and news sites and was named in *Time* magazine as one of the best inventions of 2002. The responses generated in the press are a key part of the project. There are no plans to put the Audio Tooth implant into production.

James Auger, born England 1970

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Jimmy Loizeau, born England 1968

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3

Elio Caccavale

Utility Pets

2003

Prototypes and photographs

Utility Pets is an experimental project that uses products to draw attention to the ethical consequences of xenotransplantation – the transplantation of animal organs into humans.

In the not-so-distant future, Elio Caccavale imagines that shortly after birth, people will be given a piglet with their own DNA engineered into it. The pig, known as a “knockout” pig in the scientific jargon, is a form of living insurance policy – an organ bank. This project explores what kind of new objects might be needed if the pig lives in the home with its owner's family.

The Utility Pet products include a low-resolution TV exclusively for pigs, which they can control themselves; a pig toy with a microphone and a radio handset allowing the owner to listen to the pig enjoying itself; a smoke-filtering device allowing a person to smoke in front of the pig without it suffering the consequences of passive smoking; and a comforter – a psychological product made from the snout of the sacrificed pig, which serves as a memento after the xenotransplantation has been carried out, and helps people come to terms with the contradictory feelings generated by this complex situation.

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4

Tal Drori & Davide Agnelli

Mass Distraction

2004

Interactive clothing and videos

People using their cellular phones often split their attention between those physically present and the person they are linked to remotely. They multitask between the two communication channels to remain equally connected to people both near and far. Whether or not we are aware of it, however, this practice degrades the quality of the interaction with the people in our immediate presence.

Mass Distraction is a series of three jackets – the **Coin Jacket**, the **Hood Jacket**, and the **Game Jacket** – intended to provoke thought and discussion about the idea of presence in an age when physical presence no longer guarantees a person's availability and attentiveness.

In order to use the cellular phone embedded in the Coin Jacket, the person wearing it needs to keep inserting coins in the jacket's upper-left pocket. The person wearing the Hood Jacket has to close the hood completely in order to answer the embedded phone. Finally, the person wearing the Game Jacket can only use the phone by handing the videogame in the other pocket to his or her friend. The phone conversation lasts as long as the friend keeps on playing.

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Anthony Dunne, Fiona Raby, and Michael Anastassiades

Prescription Products: Designs for Fragile

Personalities in Anxious Times

2004

Prototypes and photographs

The design profession's response to fear usually takes one of two extreme forms: denial or paranoia. In this project, the designers have explored a third possibility: What if we engaged with fear and anxiety in a rational way, even if those fears seem irrational? The resulting objects hint at an alternative domestic landscape that reflects the vulnerable, complex, and contradictory nature of human beings.

Hide Away Furniture Type 3 is one of three

pieces intended for people who are afraid of being abducted. Designed around a specific pose, it attempts to blend into the floor. The poses encourage the occupant to feel in control, proud, and comfortable – the opposite of a fetal position that would make them feel like a victim. The poses also generate an unusual geometry helping to disguise the fact that the objects can be occupied. In Type 3, the occupant lies on his or her side, head resting on hand, left leg bent outwards.

Priscila is one of several **Huggable Atomic Mushrooms** intended for people who are obsessed with the fear of nuclear annihilation. Like treatments for phobias they come in different sizes to allow for gradual exposure.

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6

Shiho Fukuhara & Georg Tremmel

Biopresence

2003

Installation and photographs

How might burial rituals change if we no longer see our bodies as matter but as information? The Biopresence project uses a genetic coding technique, invented by Joe Davis, to store human DNA within a tree or a plant without affecting the genes of the resulting organism. The trees can be seen as “Living Memorials” or “Transgenic Tombstones.” The designers believe that a growing, living tree has the ability to comfort in a completely different way than cold gravestones. But just how far are we prepared to go to alter natural structures in order to accommodate our expanding emotional needs?

Biopresence has stimulated a great deal of debate in the press and scientific journals. It is an excellent example of how design can make unspoken ethical, economic, and intellectual limits visible – and therefore debatable.

Shiho Fukuhara, born Japan 1976

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Georg Tremmel, born Austria 1977

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7

Ingrid Hora

I think I just swallowed some darkness

2004

Prototypes and photographs

A whole category of people live on the borderline between madness and normality. Ingrid wants to “narrate the life of a disordered (or hyper-ordered) society, a life of people left on their own. People build walls around themselves to create order and borders. I am interested in showing what happens behind these walls, where obsessions, desires and fantasies hide. I want to show the anarchic constructions initiated by the individuals to accommodate their strange desires and needs.”

The **Leather Collar** provides a private, portable space related to luggage and clothing. The **Wooden Collar** meets the same need, but refers to the language of furniture and architecture. The **Mattress** evokes the many discarded mattresses found on the streets of any city, suggesting, through their stains and deformations, stories about the most intimate aspects of our lives. Ingrid Hora’s Mattress is hollow, bends through ninety degrees, and allows the owners to spy, either beyond their home or into other rooms. The **Listening Chair** is for people who enjoy living their lives through the overheard conversations of others.

Ingrid Hora, born Italy 1976

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Tobie Kerridge, Nikki Stott, and Ian Thompson

Biojewellery

2003

Model and images

How might biotechnology affect fundamental ideas such as commitment? Does genetic technology offer any new possibilities for expressing everlasting love between two people?

The **Bone Ring** uses a bioactive scaffold to grow a block of biomaterial, which is then worked into two rings and combined with more traditional materials like silver. The biomaterial is composed of bone cells taken from two dedicated donors who are willing to undergo the painful process of having bone samples extracted from their rib, hip, or chin.

The project has recently received funding to grow a prototype ring and the search for an enthusiastic couple is well underway. Luckily, an easier and less painful solution has now been

found to harvest bone cells by extracting wisdom teeth. If you wish to be joined together forever, your dream can now be realized. But what will it mean to own objects grown from human cells? Objects fused with human material bring a whole new dimension to the idea of personal histories.

Tobie Kerridge, born England 1975

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Nikki Stott, born England 1977

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With bioengineer Ian Thompson

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9

Shona Kitchen & Ben Hooker

Noise Farmers: Cellular Noise-maker

From the Edge Town project

2000

Prototype and animations

Edge Town is “a proposal of not just how to live, but how to live well in urban environments which have an ever-increasing and complex electronic component.” The project conjures a world where connoisseurs employ special devices to seek out and enjoy hidden digital pleasures found in the space between city and countryside.

Stormy, secret “gardens” constantly bombarded by material from nearby roadways offer a wide variety of textures to those willing to look – patterns of dust and dirt, geometric fragments of glass and plastic, the exotic shapes of burnt-out tires, intertwining vortices of litter and dead plant matter created by air currents from traffic.

Like tending a garden, a person can strategically position noise-farming machines to sample these flows of roadside materials and pollutants – machines that generate or display data streams in the form of images, sounds, and shapes of different resolutions.

The Cellular Noise-maker resembles a large portable radio; it can be carried around in the house, keeping the occupants company. Data received by the noise-maker from noise-farming devices are stored in its memory and shown as an intricate pattern of dots on the central display. When its memory is full, the noise-maker uses its stored data patterns as a score, from which it generates a sound burst of many simultaneous clicking noises by using electromagnets to rapidly move the flaps on its surface. The clicking noise ends in a sharp FM radio pulse, which is a highly compressed data burst of the contents of the device’s memory. Following this, the memory is wiped and the process begins again.

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10

Onkar Singh Kular with APFEL

Democratisation of Fame

2004

Models and video

We live at a time when fame has finally become attainable to everyone. The proliferation of the home video, global connectivity, and the internet, and the runaway success of Reality TV all provide the tools by which everyone can achieve their fifteen minutes of fame. Democratisation of Fame explores the collapsing distinction between appearing on and watching TV.

Playing at Fame (video) is a “straight to video” training video for children who are interested in the act of “playing at fame.” The video provides various tutorials hosted by a specialist teacher in the skills, techniques, and etiquette of being famous. Tutorials include: flash exposure, red-carpet behavior, over-enthusiasm, and disguise techniques.

Objects include **Aspect Ratio 1.78:1 Hand Mirror**, a wide-screen proportioned training device for personal close-ups; **Aspect Ratio 1.78:1 Mirror**, for performing to oneself; **Aspect Ratio 1.78:1 Window**, placed above the sink, for example, for performing to neighbors and passers-by while doing mundane household jobs like washing the dishes; **Red Carpet**, a white carpet with a red walkway pattern that allows users to perfect their film premiere walk and behavior; **Paparazzi Chair**, for practicing how to get out of a car when visiting a premiere; **Gun Remote Control**, for practicing what Michael Caine has called “the perfect gun pose”: point at the TV for single, semi-, and fully automatic channel change.

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11

Hanne Louise Loecke Foverskov & James Davis

Conception Vibrator

2004

Prototype

The Conception Vibrator re-aestheticizes the insemination process by introducing pleasure and

eroticism into the pragmatic, numbingly sterile, and often humiliating procedure of artificial insemination.

This project raises the question of why society considers some objects and activities to be morally healthy while others are not. The product acts as an “agent provocateur” in the debate surrounding the right for those outside the conventional family to have children. Why are the needs of single women and homosexual couples not catered for? Why have they no choice but to insert donor semen with “turkey basters” or intimidating syringes in their pursuit of conception? Why is the most intimate and passionate moment of conception, the beginning of a new life, reduced to functional insertion?

Hanne Louise Loecke Foverskov,
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12

Ippei Matsumoto

Life Counter

2001

Prototype

With Life Counter, you choose how many years you would like to or expect to live and start the counter. Once activated, it counts down the selected time span at four different rates: the number of years, days, hours, or seconds to go are shown on different faces. Depending on which face you choose to display, you may feel very relaxed as the years stretch out ahead or begin to panic as you see your life speed away before your eyes. The counter is designed to be visually unassuming and could easily fit into the slightly retro-futuristic style of the moment. It is a classic noir product, its power lying in its precise function and low-key display of disturbing information.

Ippei Matsumoto, born Japan 1973
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13

Matthias Megyeri

Sweet Dreams Security™

2003

Prototypes and photographs

Sweet Dreams is about striving to protect ourselves while denying that the world is a bad

place. With his vicious but cute designs, Matthias Megyeri has carved an exciting new market for security products that respond to the uncomfortable balance between the growing demand for safety, exaggerated by the media, and the over-saturation of “niceness.”

Fences with bunny rabbits for posts, barbed wire woven with butterflies, padlocks shaped like teddy bears, and catlike CCTV camera covers are just part of the Sweet Dreams range. **Mrs Welcome**, a set of net curtains decorated with protection bars, is new to the range.

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14

Khashayar Naimanan

Ça Ne Vaut Pas Un Clou

Incognito

2003

Prototypes

In a world of “bling-bling” (diamonds) and footballers’ wives, these two projects explore more subtle ways of enjoying wealth. **Ça Ne Vaut Pas Un Clou** is a box of gold nails made from melted valuables, which can be hammered into the wall in order to be hidden.

Incognito consists of a set of dishes and hand-painted plates made for the German porcelain manufacturer Nymphenburg. Contrary to convention, the image decorating the plate is not painted on its upper side but rather on the bottom, where it is only visible to the owner or to guests helping to tidy up afterwards.

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15

Aparna Rao

Uncle Phone

2003–4

Prototype and photographs

Inspired by the habits, quirks, and sensibilities of specific characters in her family, Aparna designed a collection of ordinary objects to explore various ways of illuminating unspoken interpersonal relations. Each object embodies an additional dimension (beyond those of form, function, and semantics) that expresses tacit attitudes often unknowingly manifested when we use

such objects.

As the primary vehicle of this study, she designed a landline telephone (the Uncle Phone) for her extravagant uncle, who likes to have assistance when making a phone call by asking others to dial the number for him. By exaggerating the phone – making it two meters long – his behavior is now legitimized: there is no choice, the phone will only function if two people use it, one to dial the number and the other to hold the receiver. Although seemingly irrational, it reintroduces social manners and etiquette into a previously highly functional system.

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Noam Toran

Desire Management

2004–5

Prototypes and video

For Noam Toran, domestic space is defined as the last private frontier where alienated people use bespoke appliances to engage in unorthodox experiences. Based on real testimonials and news reports, his objects attempt to reveal the inherent need for self-expression in the face of banality. Desire Management is a project celebrating the use of products as platforms for dissident behavior.

Baseball Bed is a suitcase that opens to become a bed shaped like a section of a baseball field (the third base bag and foul area). The client is a thirty-five-year-old Japanese man who lost his virginity on a baseball field and wishes to recreate the experience with future partners.

Turbulent Air Hostess Trolley is a trolley with built-in turbulence. The trolley has foot pedals for the user to stand on and a series of off-centered motors that simulate varying degrees of turbulence. The client is a former airline hostess who suffered a panic attack on a flight and was subsequently released from her position. She is unable to fly, and sees the trolley as part of her ongoing therapy to regain confidence in the air.

Vacuum Scanner is a body-sized pole with a vacuum cleaner that can be used in both a vertical and a horizontal position. The client is an American widower who enjoyed being vacuumed by his wife, and has commissioned the object in order to be able to achieve the sensation on his own.

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17

George Walker

Transmission

2004

Object and images

There are approximately 300 road fatalities in London each year. More than half of these are pedestrians or cyclists. The estimated public cost of each fatality is almost £1.5 million. Transmission is a proposal to insert a transmitter into the road at the site of each non-motorist fatality, transmitting the name of the person killed and the number of days since they were hit. The transmitters are autonomously powered by tire-impact via a piezoelectric generator. As the motorist drives within the (very short) range of the transmitter, the transmission overlays the message on their car audio or telephone signal.

The fatalities are documented in a dedicated memorial website allowing the bereaved to post personal messages. The site also remedies the lack of any centralized collation of the relevant statistics by documenting and analyzing the relevant circumstantial details. An ambient campaign of pavement stickers raises awareness of the project and the issues it concerns.

George Walker, born South Africa 1972

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Texts

A

James S. Snyder

Anne and Jerome Fisher Director

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The exhibition **Design for Thought:**

Contemporary Product Design from Britain is a timely and illuminating example of how the recent infusion of different cultures within the British design scene has turned London into a hothouse of design, absorbing a remarkable spectrum of inputs and influences. Ranging from photographs and videos through prototypes to actual products, the works presented here reflect the spirit of a new generation of British designers whose enthusiasm for, and deep curiosity about, the power of design is clearly evident. What makes them stand out is their critique of philosophical and social issues that are often ignored by the world of mass production and

the global market, which are more typically driven by the forces of consumerism and fashion. The results of these new British initiatives, as illuminated here, are sometimes surprising, often humorous, and always thought provoking. And their critical outlook has already begun to infiltrate the international design scene, making the timing of this exhibition particularly opportune.

Design for Thought comprises two adjoining chapters connected by this common theme. **Found/Made/Thought** presents the work of the London-based **Industrial Facility** studio, headed by **Sam Hecht** and **Kim Colin**. A graduate of the Royal College of Art's Industrial Design Department, Hecht is known for his work on the cutting edge of technology with the multinational firm IDEO. **PopNoir** features projects by the largest group of young designers working under the umbrella of "critical design" ever to be exhibited together. Most of these are graduates of the Royal College of Art who studied with **Anthony Dunne**, a founding member – with **Fiona Raby** and others – of the College's Computer Related Design Research Studio and an influential teacher in its Design Products Department, as well as the newly appointed Head of its Interaction Design Department. Together, these artists reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity that enriches London today. Benefiting from these sources and resources, **Design for Thought** challenges the boundaries of contemporary product design and conveys the vibrant energy of the center of world design which London today has surely become.

In organizing the exhibition, we have enjoyed the enthusiastic support and assistance of the British Council, and we are grateful to them for their participation and especially for their financial support for the exhibition's publication and for related ancillary programming. We are also grateful to the donors to the Museum's 2005 Exhibition Fund, whose financial support has made the exhibition possible. Finally, we acknowledge the work of Alex Ward, the Museum's curator of design and architecture and curator of this exhibition, whose capacity for surfacing what is new and exciting in the world of design and bringing these international developments to Israel enriches our program greatly. Alex and all of the Museum staff members who worked with him in realizing this project deserve our warm gratitude.

B

Emily Campbell
British Council
Head of Design & Architecture, London
and
Ruth Ur

British Council

Assistant Director (Creativity), Israel

Two incidents recently provoked unprecedented media debate in Britain about the meaning of design. Firstly, the angry resignation of James Dyson (inventor of the bagless, dual-cyclone vacuum cleaner) as the Design Museum's Chair of Trustees. An exhibition about the pioneering mid-century styling maven Constance Spry – a Martha Stewart before her time but all too easily dismissed as a flower-arranger – was the final straw for the man who believes a design museum should principally demonstrate a sublime relationship between engineering and manufacturing technology. Secondly, the Design Museum jury's decision to award the prestigious title of Designer of the Year to Hilary Cottam, not herself a designer like her fellow candidates, but a social activist passionate about using "design thinking" to address deeply entrenched disfunction in public services, particularly prisons, schools, and health services. All of which begs us to ask: what is design anyway? In the twentieth century, chairs were really important touchstones of future thinking, as were labor-saving domestic devices, housing solutions for everyone, and, later, portable electronics. But these two incidents are at the center of a new discourse in which the meaning of design in our post-modernist, post-industrial world has irretrievably expanded. The image is recognized to be as significant as the artifact; the value of the service is known often to outstrip that of the goods; the built environment is a metaphysical concept full of hidden forces; regeneration finds more favor than the new; and design – for so many and for so long synonymous with the sleazy tag "designer" – regains some of its more abstract and divine original significance.

Design for Thought presents two great protagonists of this new-century approach. Fiona Raby and Anthony Dunne have gathered a body of "critical" design work – speculative and therapeutic solutions to citizens' fears and desires; products that deliver the "complicated pleasure" (in Martin Amis's phrase, also invoked by Dunne and Raby) of a serious joke. The collection of examples is fantastic, and a persuasive testimony to the influence wielded by this extraordinary couple over a whole generation of Royal College of Art graduates. Meanwhile Industrial Facility, led by Sam Hecht and Kim Colin, our most brilliant product designers, constantly question the tools and objects of our lives; also critical designers, in their way, they reject extreme consumption and undue technical complexity. In their world – the "landscape" of which they frequently speak – objects become inevitable prosthetics of their physical context. It is encouraging that these advocates of austerity

command the international commercial attention that they do, when conventionally we expect design to leave more crude and obvious traces.

Alex Ward, the Israel Museum's talented and perceptive Curator, brought together this group of practitioners and has created a fascinating exhibition which is not only truly of our times, but full of promise for the future of design. We are pleased that Israel, a place of such creative tradition and innovation, where still so much is so new, should be the platform for these provocative design proposals. We feel fortunate to be partners in this important project and thank James S. Snyder, the museum's Director, for his enthusiastic support. Finally, the museum's recruitment of Graphic Thought Facility, the most significant British graphic designers of their generation, to design this publication completes a representation of the conditions for design in the UK that the British Council is delighted to support.

C

Alex Ward

Curator of Design and Architecture

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

More than other design centers in the world, such as Milan and New York, London enjoys today an international reputation as a creative melting pot for talented young designers who are questioning the role of design at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Mapping out new territory, these designers are attempting to define a more relevant role for the objects we encounter daily and the spaces in which we work, communicate, and live, endowing them with new values and meanings. The focus on the future is explored in **PopNoir** through seventeen projects by young designers whose ideas are at the cutting edge of design thinking, challenging existing conventions and operating out of the normal economic and technical constraints of business. While most of the designers are graduates of the Royal College of Art, London, and most live, work, or teach in the United Kingdom, they prefer to present themselves as global designers rather than defining themselves through a narrow national identity.

Under the banner of Critical Design, these designers signal a countermovement, offering an alternative vision of design practice that is concerned with human behavior, therapy, security, and the ethical and psychological consequences of emerging technologies. Critical Design was inspired by the writings, work, and teaching of **Anthony Dunne** and **Fiona Raby**, who were leading members of the Critical Design Unit at the Royal College of Art in London. Hailed in *Metropolis* magazine as "two of Britain's most original and speculative thinkers,"

these two revolutionaries mark out virgin territory, exploring – with the help of their contemporaries – the role of electronic products in contemporary culture through critical investigation and self-initiated research projects. In their writings, including the publication of *Design Noir* in 2001, Dunne and Raby offer a more philosophical approach to new technologies, challenging the popular understanding of design and questioning its role in the global market.

Selected by Dunne and Raby, the works on display in **PopNoir** present new conceptual and critical approaches for designing products and services, which are intended to stimulate debate and discussion among the public, designers, and industry. Provoking questions that are not normally raised in commercial venues and which mark a radical departure from existing design practice, these sometimes subversive ideas indicate a future in which consumers, tired of mere styling, may demand something more substantial that addresses their genuine needs and fears.

As we face growing challenges in the new millennium, we are increasingly aware of the impact of design on our daily lives – from the cars we drive to our clothes and furniture to the new technological products we adopt as necessities, be they digital cameras or third-generation mobile phones. Ranging from objects that are already in the market to ideas that have not gone beyond photographs, videos, or prototypes, the works shown here are intended to stimulate our imagination and encourage a new discourse about how our world might be shaped by the designers of tomorrow.

D

Anthony Dunne

and

Fiona Raby

Corporate futurologists force-feed us a “happy-ever-after” portrayal of a life where technology is the solution to every problem. There is no room for doubt or complexity in these technoutopian visions. Everyone is a stereotype, and social and cultural roles remain unchanged.

The projects in this exhibition move beneath this glossy surface. They use design as a medium to question the social, cultural, and ethical implications of emerging technologies and lifestyles. All the projects demonstrate new conceptual and critical approaches for designing products and services that make our lives richer, if not necessarily more comfortable. They are disturbing, subversive, humorous, and poetic.

Most designers, especially product designers, view design as somehow neutral, clean, and pure.

But all design is ideological: the design process is informed by values based on a specific worldview – a particular way of seeing and understanding reality. Design generally falls into two very broad categories: affirmative design and critical design. The former reinforces how things are now; it conforms to cultural, social, technical, and economic expectation. Most design falls into this category. The latter rejects how things are now as being the only possibility; it provides a critique of the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical, or ethical values. The designs in this exhibition fall into this second category.

Although design's main purpose today is to provide new products – smaller, faster, better – there is room for a form of design that pushes the cultural and aesthetic potential of everyday products and services to their limits. Design that asks carefully crafted questions and makes us think is just as challenging to the designer and just as important as design that solves problems or finds answers.

The projects in this exhibition are related to haute couture, concept cars, design propaganda, and visions of the future, but their purpose is not to present the dreams of industry, attract new business, anticipate new trends, or test the market. Rather, their purpose is to stimulate discussion and debate among designers, industry, and the public about the role products play in shaping – and often limiting – our experiences of everyday life. These designs take as their raw material social, psychological, cultural, technical, and economic values.

Developing a critical perspective in design is made difficult by the fact that the design profession, and product designers in particular, see the social value of their work as inextricably linked to the marketplace. Design outside this arena is viewed with suspicion as escapist or unreal. At its worst, product design simply reinforces global capitalist values. It helps to create and maintain desire for new products, ensures obsolescence, encourages dissatisfaction with what we have, and merely translates brand values into objects. Design needs to see this for what it is – just one possibility among many – and develop alternative roles for itself. The design profession needs to establish an intellectual stance of its own, or else it risks losing all intellectual credibility and being viewed simply as an agent of capitalism.

As the intermediary between the consumer and the corporation, the design profession is in a perfect position to host a debate via design proposals about technology, consumerism, and cultural values. But first design will need to develop new communication strategies and move from narratives of production to narratives of

consumption. That is, it will have to shift the emphasis from the object and the demonstration of its feasibility to the experiences it can offer.

But for this kind of design to be effective, it must provide pleasure, or, more specifically, provide a type of experience that the British novelist Martin Amis has called "complicated pleasure." One way this could happen in design is through the development of value fictions. If in science fiction the technology is often futuristic while social values are conservative, the opposite is true in value fictions. In these scenarios, the technologies are realistic but the social and cultural values are often fictional, or at least highly ambiguous. The aim is to encourage the viewers to ask themselves why the values embodied in the proposal seem "fictional" or "unreal," and to question the social and cultural mechanisms that define what is real or fictional. The idea is not to be negative, but to stimulate discussion and debate about the role of products in everyday life. The projects in this exhibition achieve this by developing alternative and often gently provocative artifacts that set out to engage people through humor, insight, surprise, and wonder.

"Suspension of disbelief" is crucial here: if the artifacts are too strange, they are dismissed; they have to be grounded in how people really do behave. The approach is based on viewing values as raw material and shaping them into objects. Materializing unusual values in products is one way for design to be a very powerful form of social critique. The design proposals portrayed in value fictions derive their interest from their potential functionality and use. One of the main challenges in using value fictions is how to communicate them: we need to see them in use, placed in everyday life, but in a way that leaves room for the viewer's imagination. We don't actually have to use the proposed products ourselves; it is by imagining them being used that they have an effect on us. Value fictions cannot be too clear lest they blend into what we already know. A slight strangeness is the key: too weird and they are instantly dismissed; not strange enough and they're absorbed into everyday reality.

Some of the designs in **PopNoir** achieve this by drawing the viewers into a parallel world, engaging them through poetry and aesthetics, reflecting not so much on issues as on imaginary places and spaces, pointing us towards alternative worlds, like props for a non-existent film. Others could easily exist in the world as it is but draw attention to a specific issue. They subvert the language of need and function and use it to provoke. They are multilayered – functional, aesthetic but critical – not just commentaries but actually part of the world. Most explore how products can meet

psychological needs that usually go unacknowledged. They take on a therapeutic function, allowing us to project our frustrations onto them, helping us to imagine another world where neglected needs and hidden emotions connect with a material and industrial world of mass-produced objects.

The items on show in **PopNoir** provide a glimpse into a world where products, furniture, and services begin to reflect a deeper and more complex idea of what it means to be human. They acknowledge and even celebrate “real people” as messy, contradictory, and irrational beings. Each project is a unique challenge to the prevailing view of people as streamlined, functional, efficient, but ultimately unfulfilled “users.”

Endmatter

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